The Morehead State University board of regents, after meeting yesterday with Gov. Martha Layne Collins, apparently will attempt to buy out the seven months remaining on President Herb F. Reinhard Jr.'s contract.

Chairman Robert M. "Mike" Duncan of Inez said the board hoped to appoint an interim president before the General Assembly opens Jan. 7.

"It has become apparent there is a need for change at Morehead State University, and a transition is occurring at this time," Duncan said at a news conference with Collins.

The board, he said, thought "it's in the best interest of Morehead State University to expedite this transition. We have developed a timetable to start working with President Reinhard to facilitate this transition."

The board has refused to renew the contract of Reinhard, whose tenure at Morehead has been wracked by controversy since he became president in July 1984. His contract will expire June 30.

While Duncan took pains to avoid using the word "buy-out" concerning Reinhard's contract, the board chairman said in an interview that "by our actions it's pretty obvious he's willing to negotiate. We're willing to negotiate with him."

Duncan said the board did not have a candidate in mind to serve as interim president. However, he emphasized that the interim president would be someone "who cannot and will not be a candidate to be the permanent president of the university."

An interim president will "add stability to our campus," he said, adding that naming someone by Jan. 7 would allow that person to work with the legislature as it allocates funds for the state's universities.

Duncan also said the board would begin a search for a permanent president, but he declined to set a timetable.

Under state law, private funds would have to be used to buy out Reinhard's contract. Duncan declined to discuss how such funds might be obtained.

Collins said the "contract will be discussed and addressed." But she said the "discussion should not occur
in the press at this time."

Reinhard earns $75,000 a year.

He said by telephone from Morehead that he had not talked with the board about buying out his contract.

However, Reinhard said he had authorized his lawyer, John Pinney of Cincinnati, to pursue any negotiations that might be proposed.

Reinhard said Pinney "has talked with some people in Frankfort and possibly some board members," but the Morehead president said he did not know the status of those conversations.

Pinney, reached by phone in Cincinnati, declined to comment.

Larry Hayes, the governor's cabinet secretary, confirmed that the governor's office had had several discussions with Pinney about "this issue of transition."

Reinhard again said that he had been "nominated" for other jobs, including some presidencies. But he said he had "no job prospects at the moment."

He said he had intended to serve out the remainder of his contract.

The rare meeting between a governor and a state university board marked the first time a governor has become directly involved in a campus dispute since 1982. At that time, then-Gov. John Y. Brown Jr. requested the resignations of several regents of Murray State University.

His request came after a badly divided Murray board refused to renew the contract of then-President Constantine Curris.

Reinhard came to Morehead in July 1984 after five years as president of Slippery Rock (Pa.) University. His tenure at Morehead became embroiled in controversy almost immediately.

Reinhard enacted a sweeping administrative reorganization and took other actions that seemed to split the heavily politicized campus. Although he has had many supporters, Reinhard also has encountered numerous critics who attacked him for moving too swiftly and abrasively on the northeastern Kentucky campus.

The Morehead board refused in August to renew Reinhard's contract. However, the board voted Nov. 4 to ask Reinhard to serve out his contract while it appointed a "transition committee" to plan for his successor.

Collins said she had summoned the regents so "a lot of people should realize that the governor is supportive
of action to take place in order to get Morehead State University moving forward for the future.”

The governor said she had been "accused by some of not providing leadership," but she said her critics were not always aware of actions she was undertaking "quietly" and behind the scenes.

But the governor disavowed any intention of running the university or having a hand in naming its new president.

"I think we should keep politics out of it," she said.

Eight of the 10 Morehead board members attended the session in the governor’s office. Virtually all declined to comment, referring questions to board chairman Duncan.

Absent were Harry LaViers Jr. of Irvine, who was out of state, and Patricia Burchett of Paintsville.

The Morehead board also has been invited to meet with the state Council on Higher Education at its Dec. 3 meeting. That discussion is supposed to focus on Morehead's problems and future, but not specifically the Reinhard controversy or the search for a new president.

The council has expressed concern about significant enrollment declines at Morehead in recent years. This year enrollment dropped about 9 percent, forcing budget cuts and reallocations of about $727,000.